



## A community ruined

Michael Meyer records the death of a hutong in his book *The Last Days of Old Beijing*. His vignettes of the vanishing city are finally available in Chinese in a new edition by Shanghai Translation Publishing House.

The book follows the story of a community living a collision of eras, and how a market economy smashed what had weathered centuries of political turmoil.

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# UK announces new visa services

By Zhao Hongyi

On May 8, Minister of Government Policy Oliver Letwin announced new premium UK visa services for Chinese business travelers and tourists.

The new VIP Mobile Visa Service and Passport Pass-Back are hoped to buttress the strong growth in Chinese visitors bound for the UK.

The priority visa service has been extended to 11 of the 12 UK visa application centers, and those applying to go to the UK as Tier 2 skilled migrants are now also eligible to use the priority service.

Letwin has been in China for a weeklong series of meetings with business, tourism and education groups to discuss growing interest in the UK as a destination for tourism, business, investment and study.



Oliver Letwin visits Nanjing Industrial Zone in Jiangsu Province during his stay in China. CFP Photo

As many as 96 percent of the Chinese nationals who apply for a UK visa are successful.

There has been a 75 percent increase in the number of Chinese UK visa applicants since 2009, and 2013 is expected to shatter past records with more than 350,000 Chinese visitors.

The VIP Mobile Visa Service offers high-value business cus-

tomers the chance to have UK visa officers collect their biometric data and visa application at their workplace.

"China is a priority market for the UK and we're committed to ensuring we're doing all we can to support growth and encourage visitors and investment," Letwin said.

"For applicants are really

rich and busy, these services will be available no matter the applicant is business type or any other types," he said.

The Passport Pass-Back service, available to business visitors and group tourists, allows customers to retain their passport to travel or apply for another visa while their UK visa is being processed. The price ranges from 260 to 520 yuan.

"The new VIP Mobile Visa Service and the Passport Pass-Back service are just two examples of the innovative services we provide customers. We will be using the feedback from this trip to further develop our visa offer," Letwin said.

From June 1, all Chinese students who want to study in the UK must have an interview with a UK visa official. Spot checks began on April 29.

"The new policy is to attract the real international students to pass the interview and get the visa," Letwin said. "We want to screen out 'students' who want to enter the UK for work."

Many Chinese institutes offer courses in how to pass the interviews.

The VIP Mobile Visa Service and Passport Passback service will both be available to business customers in Beijing and Shanghai.

In 2012, the Home Office of the UK government received 296,795 visa applications from Chinese nationals worldwide.

The UK visa service in China is prompt, with 47 percent of non-settlement visas processed within 5 days and 97 percent within 15 days.

The visa service operates 12 locations across the country.

## Climate Race promotes bicycling, eco awareness

By Zhao Hongyi

Last Sunday, hundreds gathered at the Danish Embassy to celebrate a Climate Race for Earth Day.

Participants, including Danish Ambassador to China Friis Arne Petersen and Chinese actor Liu Ye, departed from the embassy and toured Sanlitun to promote green transportation and raise awareness of climate issues.

Later in the day, the bikers headed to Yanqing County, northwest Beijing, where local bike club members joined in the race.

Petersen said Denmark and China share a belief that good energy policies are vital to solving environmental

problems.

In Denmark, bicycles are promoted as a healthy and sustainable method of transportation. One third of the population prefers bicycling to driving a car.

Weeks before the Climate Race, the Danish Embassy raised 30,000 yuan for local organizations advocating environmentalism.

Petersen handed over the charity donations to the NGO "Smarter than Cars."

The ambassador donated 10 bicycles to youths in Yanqing County.

The Danish embassy also hosted an exhibition explaining the benefits of green transportation.



Danish ambassador Friis Arne Petersen departs for the Climate Race.

Photo provided by Danish Embassy

## Roland Berger suggests AZBB for multinationals

By Zhao Hongyi

Asia is the world's factory no more, according to a Roland Berger survey named "think:act CONTENT."

The study examines the need for companies in Asia to learn how to run a tight ship without sacrificing growth where the rising costs and increased competition threaten their performance.

The study introduces Roland Berger's Accelerated Zero-Based Budgeting (AZBB) methodology, a bottom-up cost management model that reduces unnecessary spending by rebuilding a clean budget around streamlined expenditures and optimized activities.

According to the report, Asia's traditionally low-cost



In Asia, labor-intensive industries are facing a crunch.

CFP Photo

manufacturing bases are now advanced economies. However, they are developing parallel to rising input costs, creating slow growth and new competition.

Since 2006, the cost of labor in China has increased 130 percent. Coal, natural gas and oil costs are also on the rise, growing by 106 percent,

102 percent and 40 percent over the last six years.

Furthermore, major Asian companies such as Tencent, ThaiBev and KDDI are expanding aggressively throughout the region, putting new pressure on their foreign competitors.

Asian economies on the whole are likely in for a period

of slower growth due to recent global economic misadventures.

"Scale is no longer enough to guarantee success. This new generation of CEOs in Asia will need to be more agile in their management structures going forward," says Charles-Edouard Bouee, a member of the Global Executive Committee and president of Roland Berger Asia.

"Big companies can be unwieldy. We see that a lot in Asia's SOEs and large local conglomerates. AZBB methodology works to overcome that."

Compared to other methodologies, AZBB focuses on sustainable cost savings tailored to changing market conditions.

"Each AZBB project provides a cost management solu-

tion for companies that helps them run leaner, more dexterous operations and identify hard savings that can be re-invested in growth," says Alain Le Couedic, a partner at Roland Berger in Hong Kong.

AZBB gives line managers a framework on which to build rationale and consensus for cost reductions based on their front-line experience.

By focusing on achieving cost discipline via consensus, AZBB guarantees that initiatives are developed in partnership with the managers who will implement them.

This creates a cost-conscious culture at all levels of the organization that helps ensure that efficiency is sustainable and participatory.



# Indie record stores struggle to stay relevant

By Liu Xiaochen

In an age when long play (LP) records have become antiques and cassette tapes completely forgotten, CDs may be the last physical music medium listeners can remember.

But the indie fans are not like other listeners.

Although there are many indie fans eager to support record stores, their survival has been difficult. Many collapsed during the last year, driving music fans to the Internet for their fix.

But not all listeners are willing to go digital.

## Chinese indie

Indie bands are those who insist on the DIY spirit and release their work in limited runs on low-budget labels.

The Chinese indie scene has a handful of popular indie labels such as Modern Sky and Maybe Mars.

For indie bands, these labels offer a chance to explore sounds and musical themes that would be unpopular with or unfamiliar to mainstream listeners.

But such releases earn quite little.

The domestic indie music scene exploded during the early 2000s. In 2005, it underwent a fundamental shift when a handful of neo folk indie artists were discovered by the media.

After that, indie musicians such as Wan Xiaoli and Su Yang drove the scene. Through the promotional efforts of their labels, they went from singing in bars to headlining at live-houses such as Star Live and Mao Live House.

The popular exposure led more and more listeners to the indie music scene and fueled a demand for indie records and record stores.

## Store operation

An extreme devotion to the indie music scene seems to be the only thing keeping the last few stores – Free Sound, Indie Music, BlueLine Records and Rockland – going.

Fu Xiong, who founded BlueLine Records in 1994, said these stores have had to hone their focus to keep customers.

“When there were many indie record stores, shoppers came to differentiate them by their character,” Fu said.



CFP Photos



Rockland at Houhai, Xicheng District

Free Sound's owner Wang Zhuohui agreed.

“Listeners tend to prefer record stores that align with their own preferences and aesthetics,” Wang said. “Indie record stores’ offerings must be targeted, because they are serving a minority. The gap between comprehensive stores and indie record stores is widening every day.”

Free Sound opened in Pinganli, Xicheng District in 2002. Wang opened a branch store at 798 Art Zone in 2010.

But in spite of their devoted customer base, indie record stores still face falling sales and rising costs.

Finding employees is also difficult, and few indie music lovers are willing to work for low pay.

“When customers spend less, we have to find more services we can offer. Having

employees who know indie music and who can interact with the customers is extremely important. It's part of the brick-and-mortar charm that makes customers willing to spend what a record is worth,” Wang said.

Fu Xiong has taken another approach, worrying that such high demands affect staff mobility.

“Beijing has very few record stores. The ones that are left are being squeezed by piracy and digital downloads,” he said. “My store is still profitable, but our future is not optimistic.”

“I will have to diversify and sell related products, as well as less common and valuable records. I will probably start selling more LPs: they are getting popular again.”

Indie Music and Rockland are supported by their owners' side jobs.

Rockland was founded 10 years ago. Today, owner Zhan Xu supports the store as a freelance designer.

“Beijing's indie music scene was very strong from 2005 to 2008. We had a lot more customers. I felt good about giving them my recommendations, and many of them helped recommend new artists to their friends,” Zhan said.

Another store, Indie Music, was founded in 2011 by Guo Cheng and a friend. Guo used to handle record production and show arrangement at Modern Sky. Today, he still organizes some tours and shows.

“Few people listen to physical albums today, and few among them like indie,” Guo said. “Most of our customers today are either a fan of a specific artist, or they just like collecting low-circulation records.”

## Connecting with musicians

Successful indie record stores rely on more than trade. Most have owners with deep connections in the indie music scene.

Free Sound began coordinating indie releases and popularizing indie albums in 2005. In the years since, it has helped many artists sell their albums through its channels.

Zhan founded a bar named 69 Café for musicians to perform. He helps his favorites to

design posters.

Carsick Cars, a band on the Maybe Mars label, often bought albums at his store in high school. He invited them to perform at his show to celebrate Rockland's upcoming 10th anniversary.

“Record stores can help musicians to grow. Owners often recommend records that help them to form their own style,” Zhan said. “There are many indie musicians, but most have few listeners. I try to provide a space where they can promote their music.”

He hopes to turn his store into a small label to introduce indie musicians and help them produce albums. So far, he has selected seven indie musicians.

“Through my former job I met a lot of Chinese bands. As a store, we owe them our support,” Guo said.

“But the current indie labels can never release albums for everyone. There are lots of musicians waiting to be discovered. There are many who pour all their energy into their music instead of marketing, and they are never discovered,” he said.

The recent trend of music festivals has helped many indie artists to be discovered.

“But more people listening to indie music does not translate into more people buying it,” Guo said.

“This is still the ultimate problem.”



# Report explores China's LGBT employment

By Liu Xiaochen

It's not hard to find a gay bar or openly gay men in downtown Beijing.

China has a thriving lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community that is supported by such innovative tools as a location-based gay social networking app.

But in the workplace, most of China's LGBT individuals opt to remain in the closet in spite of a decade of improved social acceptance.

Last Friday, the International Day Against Homophobia, the NGO Aibai Culture and Education Center released a new report about the employment world of LGBT Chinese. The report was based on a survey conducted between January and April on the Chinese mainland that had 2,161 responses.

According to the report, 47.6 percent of Chinese gays and lesbians keep their sexuality a secret in the workplace, and only 6.3 percent are open. The rest revealed their sexual orientation only to trusted colleagues.

More than half reported hearing offensive words



British Ambassador to Chile Jon Benjamin waves from a window of the embassy after hoisting the gay pride flag on International Day Against Homophobia.

CFP Photo

aimed at LGBT people, and 32.4 percent reported witnessing or experiencing a personal attack based on a person's sexual orientation at the workplace.

More than a fifth had left a job due to a work environment that was hostile to their sexuality.

The report also showed that LGBT workers at state-

owned enterprises faced more pressure, and that people with higher education are less likely to come out for fear of how their sexual orientation could affect career advancement.

Gay employees were less likely to come out than lesbians, and bisexuals were the least likely to come out.

City size had limited effect on a person's ultimate choice

of whether or not to come out: urban residents were more likely to consider career advancement, while those in small towns are more worried about conservative family members.

The survey was the first to examine the situation of Chinese LGBT employees. It was released at the Beijing American Center and supported by the American embassy, LesTalk, Feizan.com, PFLAG China and SynTao.

M. Hanscom Smith, minister counselor of Economic Affairs, attended the report release. He said he felt respected in China as a gay.

"When people ask me, for example, are you married, I will say no, I'm not, I have a partner. Some older people will be quiet but young people are more open and accepting," he said. "I have not faced many awkward situations or discrimination, though it may be because of my position and because I'm a foreigner," he said.

Zhou Haibin, national project coordinator of the International Labour Organization (ILO), said discriminating against LGBT people goes against international law.

"LGBT individuals should have equal access to education, work and occupation placement services, the right to join in organizations for workers and employers, promotions, collective bargaining, equal pay for equal work, employment security, welfare facilities and allowance, occupation safety and

health, work hours and holidays," Zhou said.

ILO's director-general, Guy Ryder, said ILO is stepping up efforts to eradicate workplace discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity on May 17 at Geneva, Switzerland.

Reports show that enterprises that do not provide a friendly and tolerant environment for their LGBT employees could be damaging their employees' efficiency. Productivity has been shown to fall by as much as 30 percent when workers are in the closet.

Business entities that support sexual minorities and protect their rights benefit from their LGBT employees' performance and company loyalty.

"I think the advertising industry attaches importance to personality and the ideas. It should popularize the concepts of diversity and equality," said Gogo, a lesbian open about her sexual orientation at work. "Retaining designers is a problem for many companies. If the company's culture supports LGBT people and promotes equality, it will be more likely to give employees a sense of belonging."

Nationwide reports such as the Corporate Equality Index, started by Human Rights Campaign in US in 2001, and Workplace Equality Index, launched by Stonewall Equality in the UK in 2005, have become important references and effective catalysts in advocating diversity and improving workplace equality.

Every company on *Fortune Magazine's* list of the "100 Best Companies to Work For" includes sexual orientation in their nondiscrimination policies, and more than half of these companies also include language on gender identity.

In the US, more than 80 percent of the enterprises have policies that clearly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in staff recruitment, workplace and commercial activities. Many multinational enterprises in the US, including IBM, Microsoft, Google, Apple, Boeing, Coca Cola and Disney, provide benefits to LGBT employees and their partners.

## Foundations disclose quake donations

By Liu Xiaochen

More than 1.38 billion yuan of money and materials has been raised for victims of the Lushan earthquake, according to data from the China Foundation Center (CFC).

Six foundations raised more than 50 million yuan each: One Foundation, China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation, China Primary Health Care Foundation, Shanghai Charity Foundation, China Youth Development Foundation and China Women's Development Foundation.

Their combined contributions were 840 million yuan, or 60 percent of the total funds raised by the 144 foundations CFC monitored.

CFC began collecting data about relief donations within 12 hours of the quake.

Three days after the quake, CFC established the

China Foundation 4.20 Disaster Relief Self-discipline Union for public and private foundations involved in relief, resettlement and reconstruction for victims of the Lushan earthquake.

Union members are required to make their donation process open to both the government and the public, to answer media inquiries truthfully and assume relevant legal liabilities.

The 144 foundations have disbursed a total of 305 million yuan so far.

Eighty-nine foundations have disclosed how their funds are being used: most are going toward buying articles for daily use, supporting education and medical treatment or infrastructure projects.

Seventy-four foundations have said how they plan to use the remaining

funds. Getting the most out of the donation funds will be a challenge during the next stage of reconstruction, CFC said.

CFC has created an online resource to publish data about how funds are being used. During the next three years, it will add timely reports about how funds are being used so that the government, media and the public can supervise each foundation.

Five years ago, the nation donated 76 billion yuan to support the victims of the Wenchuan earthquake. At that time, 1.375 billion came from foundations.

Fewer than 5 percent of the donors ever learned how their funds were used during the first year, according to Professor Deng Guosheng at Tsinghua University's School of Public Policy and Management.



# Understanding Qiu Jiongiong through his paintings

By Bao Chengrong

Qiu Jiongiong, known as a genius of modern Chinese art, has created his own style of painting by drawing his former experiences into his works which are now on display at the 2nd Qiu Jiongiong Art Festival.

"I never expect to explain the world through my paintings, but I can at least paint to know the world," Qiu said. "The content of my works is closely connected with my DNA, my knowledge gained from readings and my life experience."

One of his favorite subjects is clowns.

When he was little, Qiu often saw clowns perform in theaters, as his grandfather was a renowned clown performer of Sichuan Opera. After becoming a performer himself, Qiu learned more about the complicated relationship between a performer and his role.

On stage, the anxious and vulnerable side of clowns often goes unnoticed behind their exaggerated expressions. But in Qiu's paintings, it comes to the fore.

"Life is like a play," he said. "The real clown's spirit appears when someone's body conflicts or mixes with his social identity."

*Little Chubby Girl* subverts the adorable and innocent image of an angel. The fat and twisted face of the subject is that of an adult, but her curls, small mouth and feathered wings indicates her childish side.

Qiu also merges adults and children in his pieces, like in *My Mother's Rhapsody*, featuring *Cupid*.

Eminent monks are another of Qiu's inspirations, at least as seen from the works displayed at the 2nd Qiu Jiongiong Art Festival. Qiu said his muses included Monk Guanxiu from the Tang Dynasty, Chinese wash ink painter Liang Kai from the Song Dynasty and Leonardo Da Vinci.

Qiu portrays the monks as he sees them, and is willing to embrace misinterpretations of his work. He said he can still remember the low-quality magazine pictures he studied under dim lighting at his father's factory. Even many years later, he still feels more association with those fuzzy and mysterious images than high-resolution ones, because the former



Weeping Woman



Sanmao

Photos provided by Star Gallery



Liberty Leading the People

contain the possibilities and fears of the unknown.

This early experience is reflected in Qiu's style. He uses dark colors to obscure details, leaving room for the audience to construct their own understanding.

In another section, called Legends, the relationship between Qiu and the characters he portrays is clear. You can see the anxiety in the wash ink painting *Going Home Drunk* and the oil painting *Sanmao*.

The latter uses the Chinese orphan *Sanmao*, who has become a positive symbol, with his big smile and optimistic attitude, as depicted in books and films.

In Qiu's painting, however, the boy wears a somber expression. He holds a cigarette in his mouth, and his eyes contain a look of unpleasantness.

If *Sanmao* is the reflection of adult Qiu, *Liu Hai* and *Frog* may represent the child Qiu. The boy holds the frog tightly while vigilantly looking ahead.

"Is the picture trying to release the childhood shadow of the painter?" asked Lü Xin, an art critic and Qiu's friend. "The talented child always reacts differently to external stimuli."

Qiu recreates the ancient Chinese theme of "eight houses" with an image of the Western film character Monsieur Verdoux (played by Charlie Chaplin) and drawing the houses with human expressions.

Qiu also recreates the classical painting *Liberty Leading the People*, a memorial of the French Revolution. Qiu uses black humor to change the French soldiers into the image of Chinese clowns.

Another section, *In the Scene*, reveals Qiu's painting habits. He follows the lead of ancient scholars and creates scenic paintings. The subjects wake up and get drunk, then wake up again and resume painting.

"In those oppressive afternoons, I didn't create any paintings, but I



Qiu Jiongiong

had already lived in paintings," Qiu said about his younger days. "Maybe it was a way to feel the atmosphere in the scenes."

During the last three years, Qiu has spent less time painting and more time helping out with indie films.

The Hormone section of the exhibition has paintings depicting political colors. Qiu portrays China in the troubled times of Mao Zedong. "China used to be a country with too many hormones – an unbalanced amount," Qiu said about that era.

Finally, the last section is *My Father*. One of Qiu's earliest works can be found here – something that took him 18 years to complete.

Qiu's father has had a great influence on him. Qiu sees his father as his most important supporter throughout the years.

"Painters tell their stories and ideas through brush," he said. "The audience 'listens to' them. They communicate with each other in silence."

Zhang Yaxuan, the curator of the indie film part of the art festival, said Qiu's paintings tend to focus more on his inner world while his films stretch out to portray his family.

"His paintings and films provided two dimensions with slight differences. They combine to construct a more complete world of Qiu Jiongiong. How do the two worlds connect with each other? I think one is a dramatic feature and the other is a political feature," Zhang said.

"The dramatic feature is more conspicuous in his art. He often uses the consciousness of the stage to build the relationship between the characters in films and the audience. The political feature is more direct in his paintings, but has broader meanings in his films," Zhang said.



Little Chubby Girl



# Obliteration of the hidden Beijing



Photos provided by Shanghai Translation Publishing House and Michael Meyer

By Chen Nan

The conflict between preservation and modernization is ongoing. It's a question of what is tangible and what is not, what counts as true culture and what doesn't.

Michael Meyer, author of the award-winning *The Last Days of Old Beijing: Life in the Vanishing Backstreets of a City Transformed*, about his two years living in a soon-to-be-demolished hutong in Beijing, has given these questions much thought.

## Eras collide

Vignettes of Old Beijing, gathered over a thousand years, never fail to fascinate foreign travelers and expats.

But few immerse themselves completely in the lifestyle of courtyard homes, subdivided into small rooms and narrow lanes – the hutong.

Meyer captures the city's past in order to illuminate its present. He describes the ebb and flow of lives in Beijing around 2008 in *The Last Days of Old Beijing*.

The book describes life around one of the capital's dwindling traditional neighborhoods, just south of Tiananmen Square. His neighborhood was slated for destruction in the run-up to the Olympics.

Hutong life was not easy. There was a lack of plumbing, for one. People shared bathrooms. But initially intimidated by the lack of amenities, Meyer eventually found a way to embrace life within the community.

He taught English at a neighborhood elementary school to pay his rent.

"These hutong thrive with a communitarian spirit that is absent anywhere else in the city," Meyer said. It is the people, he said, not the architecture, that is his account's greatest strength, and the hutong's most convincing reason for enduring.

"When you root in the courtyard you've built a connection to the history, or even to the truth," said He Yujia, who translated the book into Chinese.

## A living book

Meyer records the stories of his



Michael Meyer with his students



neighbors: the Widow, who shares his courtyard; teacher Miss Zhu; students in the primary school, such as Little Liu; and the migrants Recycler Wang and Soldier Liu. All the characters, despite great differences in age and profession, make up the fabric of this unique neighborhood.

But his intimate encounters with neighbors were altered by demolition.

"The neighbors' bond is rapidly being torn, however, by forced evictions as old houses and ways of life are destroyed to make way for shopping malls and other projects," he wrote.

"The epitaph for Beijing will read: born 1280, died 2008 ... what emperors, warlords, Japanese invaders and Communist planners couldn't eradicate, the market economy can."

## Lots of research

Meyer, who has published stories in *Time*, the *New York Times Book Review*, the *Financial Times*, *Reader's Digest*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, is the recipient of the Whiting Writers Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship and residencies at the New York Public Library's Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center and the American Academy of Berlin.

In China, he has represented the National Geographic Society's Center for Sustainable Destination and trained China's UNESCO World Heritage Site managers in preservation practices.

He has been enchanted by China's cultural heritage for years. His mixture of romanticism and Chinese pragmatism intrigue readers who don't have a chance to live in the hutong.

Kate Sekules, who writes for the *New York Times Book Review*, wrote "As we watch athletes gasping for



breath in 'Bird's Nest' stadium beneath a gaudy international skyline, Meyer's message will sound especially poignant. All in all, his record of the dying ways of a city is an impressive feat. And while the phenomenon may be most extreme there, it's not just Beijing's problem. In a way, we're all living on New Ancient Culture Street."

People probably won't notice what the old city sacrificed for the Games, but Meyer saw it all.

He first arrived in 1995 with the Peace Corps. His first destination was Neijiang in Sichuan Province, where he taught in a vocational-technical school as an English teacher.

In 1997, after he completed his service, he embarked on a journey to the country's heart, Beijing. He was not always enchanted by hutong life. At first he worked for an international school in Beijing's outskirts. Every time the scheduled bus went through the city's old areas, he was awed by the uniqueness of the layout.

The book was originally supposed to be about the architecture of urban Beijing. But his curiosity led him deep into a vanishing world that other visitors and foreign correspondents almost only see from the outside.

In the spring of 2003, he was talking in a bar about his book idea when a woman overheard his conversation.

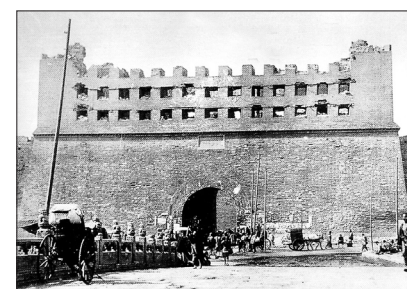
"She gave me a number and said a courtyard of a friend of hers was about to be demolished," he said. That's how he met Mr. Yang, who guided him to the demolition sites.

Meyer found it more urgent to write about the potentially massive loss of this dense social network.

He decided to move into the hutong to experience this special lifestyle. He constructed his book from observations and research, and also turned to Chinese architects and cultural preservationists, including the famous writer Feng Jikai, who has been protecting an ancient street in Tianjin for years.

He also puts it in the context of the greater history of Beijing, and attempts at preservation in China and around the world. He also consulted China's city planner books, such as Liang Sicheng's early works.

And Meyer brings to life the architect Liang Sicheng, whose visions of Beijing's transformation in the 1950s and 1960s haunt city planners today.





# Stores at Beiluogu Xiang



By Annie Wei

In summertime, the city's hutong network becomes an oasis, giving the city's workers a respite from the daily grind.

This week, *Beijing Today* scouted hutong at the north end of tourist-packed Nanluogu Xiang – Beiluogu Xiang, with new bars, restaurants and stores that remain under the radar.



At the gate of 1/2 Zhiwu



Succulents galore

Photos by An Jianda

## Succulent plants

1/2 zhiwu comes highly recommended by young shoppers. It's a small hutong house with two window walls that sells vintage items, accessories and lots of plants.

Succulents have become quite popular in recent years. They are beautiful and basically indestructible, and also great for creating a miniature indoor garden.

A succulent is a plant with thick water-storage organs, such as aloe and agave.

The store's succulents are not expensive, starting from 20 yuan for a small pot. The vendor will also give advice on how to keep succulents.

All succulents prefer bright light, as the plants were originally grown in places with lots of sunshine and little water. But if exposed to direct sunlight, the succulent leaves will scorch, and turn brown or pale. You need to adjust the light accordingly.

Generally, the best temperature for succulents is between 10 to 45 C. However, as pot succulents are tiny and more vulnerable, the temperature should be cooler.

Succulents need more water in the summer, but only need to be watered once a month during cooler months. The plant will rot if given too much water. Make sure to pot your succulents in a fast-draining mixture.

You can use some fertilizer during the summer, but never during the winter.

**1/2 zhiwu**

Where: 47  
Beiluogu Xiang,  
Dongcheng District  
Open: noon to 8 pm



## Old-school cameras

The store Spring Cameras is interesting if you're interested in out-of-date stuff like Polaroid and film cameras, and used items such as leather bags, sunglasses and notebooks.

The prices are reasonable compared to many other vintage shops. A black leather business bag starts at 258 yuan; a red vintage telephone made in a 1980s Tianjin factory costs 130 yuan; a red English typewriter is 230 yuan.

You can also find Polaroid products at its online store [idouban.taobao.com](http://idouban.taobao.com), and other vintage items at [old-goods.taobao.com](http://old-goods.taobao.com).

**Spring Cameras**

Where: 52 Cheniandian Hutong, off Beiluogu Xiang,  
Dongcheng District  
Open: 11 am – late  
Tel: 6729 2366



Inside and out of Spring Cameras.



Photos by An Jianda



# Seafood season



By Annie Wei

Seafood is fast and easy to prepare – all one needs to do is clean some mussels, clams or lobsters, put them in boiling water for a few minutes, then remove and eat.

But many diners are suspicious of the local seafood quality. Given the city is not near the sea and pollution is serious, how fresh can seafood be, and how is its quality guaranteed?

This week, *Beijing Today* scouted places that come recommended for their seafood. One is Wangfujing Hilton, known for its seafood weekend brunch, the other is Starfish, a cozy, community restaurant and an inexpensive street grill.



Alaskan king crab legs

Photos provided by Hilton Beijing Wangfujing

## Seafood feast at Hilton Wangfujing

Hilton Wangfujing's Fizztastic champagne Sunday brunch, with a focus on seafood, began last weekend and will last until July 12. Apart from champagne and jazz, diners can enjoy as much seafood as they want, both cooked and raw.

Normally, Alaskan king crab legs are served raw and on ice, but here you can ask the chef to prepare them in other ways, such as steamed or grilled. They come in large portions.

For sashimi or sushi, the chef will start preparing from a whole tuna, right in front of you.

What we enjoyed the most were the oysters from different regions, such as French Fin de Claire and Special de Claire, South Africa and Tasmania.

The baby rock lobsters are also recommended, as they are the most popular among the hotel's brunch selections. The clam mix is also delicious.

### Fizztastic Champagne Sunday Seafood Brunch

Where: Vasco's Restaurant, Hilton Beijing Wangfujing, Wangfujing Dajie, Dongcheng District

Open: 11:30 am – 3 pm

Tel: 5812 8888 ext. 8411

Cost: 458 yuan with 15 percent surcharge

### Quality oysters at Starfish

The restaurant opposite the Canadian



Baby rock lobsters



Oysters from France

Embassy has earned a reputation among seafood diners for its quality fish and oysters.

Before opening, the owners had a premium seafood importing business.

We recommend its crab cake (76 yuan), seafood platter (388 yuan), shrimp cocktail (86 yuan) – made with fresh and tasty Vietnamese tiger prawn with lemon or horseradish sauce – and cioppino soup (65 yuan), with a decent amount of shrimp, squid, clams and scallops.

The patio is now open with a happy hour from 2 to 7 pm, during which oysters, house wine and beer are priced 25 yuan each.

### Starfish

Where: 22-1, Dongzhimen Wai Dajie, Dongcheng District

Open: 11 am – 11 pm

Tel: 6416 5499

## Seafood from street vendors

If you are looking for some yummy seafood available at low prices, we recommend Hongyan Haixian Dapaidang.

The place used to sell kababs, but has turned into a spacious outdoor grill and dining spot. Many diners say the seafood isn't bad, and recommend the meat and fried dishes.

### Hongyan Haixian Dapaidang

Where: 172 Beiyuan Lu, near Xi Dawang Lu, Chaoyang District

Open: 5 pm – late

Tel: 8731 7885

## Spicy Sichuan for summer

The popular Lanren Yeyu Canting at Laiguangying, which requires reservations, has opened a second outlet downtown, near Anzhenqiao within North Third Ring Road.

Because the restaurant is more selective with its ingredients, many Sichuan food lovers have taken it as their first choice.

Unlike the one at Laiguangying, the Anzhen outlet allows walk-in dining.

We recommend stewed bamboo shoots with ham (starting from 158 yuan). The bamboo shoots are from a remote area in Sichuan, while the Yunan Dengnuo ham is known for its delicate, unique flavor.

Spicy meat soup pot (starting from 68 yuan for a small serving) is a highlight, and is spicy, numbing and delicious. You can select bullfrogs or six kinds of fish. When one finishes the meat, you can mix the soup with rice or noodle. The restaurant encourages diners to take the leftover soup home, place it in the refrigerator and use it to make a simple meal the next day.

Unlike many Chinese restaurants, Lanren Yeyu Canting's dining hall offers coffee and wine in the afternoon.

### Lanren Yeyu Canting – Anzhen store

Where: Southwest of Anzhenqiao, Bei Sanhuan Lu, Chaoyang District

Open: 11:30 am – 9:30 pm

Tel: 5624 4977



Fried spicy pork and vegetables, 38 yuan



Stewed bamboo shoots with ham, starting from 158 yuan



Spicy shrimps, starting from 68 yuan

Photos by An Jianda